

PAUL STEPHENS

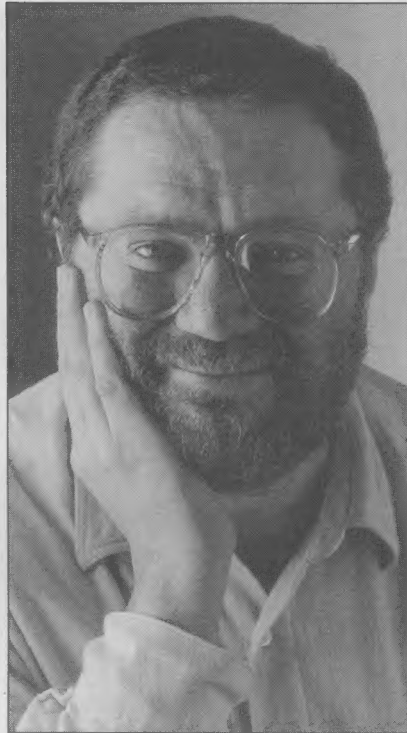
The event of the month was undoubtedly the *Windows Show*, at Olympia in London. 18 months ago *Windows* was a cheap add-on of limited popularity. The fact that it now rates a show of its own is a mark of how fortunes have changed in the past year.

The show itself was fairly small, but well stocked with big-name companies armed with *Windows* applications. Lotus was showing off its newly-purchased *Ami* word processor, while WordStar Corporation responded with the newly-acquired *Legacy* package. The *Legacy* buy-in was rumoured to have been a second-best deal for WordStar, after Lotus beat it to the *Ami* post; it was certainly a late entry, with no mention in the show catalogue and the confusion of seeing NBI selling *Legacy* off its own stand as an independent product.

Elsewhere there were a surprising number of *Windows* database products, including a few with links to SQL (Structured Query Language) network servers, and less emphasis on graphics and design software than I'd expected. Borland was showing its object-oriented C++ compiler and also *ObjectVision*, an application development package which uses 'visual programming techniques' and offers links to both *Paradox* and *dBASE* database files.

Training was very much to the fore; even British Airways popped up (in the guise of 'Speedwing Technologies Training'), with courses on everything from *dBASE* to inter-personal skills. *Windows* is becoming the main platform for PC desktop publishing, and Aldus was there with *PageMaker 4.0*, its 75 new features leap-frogging over Xerox's *Ventura for Windows* but still leaving it open to competition from the forthcoming PC version of Quark's Macintosh-based *XPress*.

The show was good, and gave a strong impression of *Windows* as an environment for business computing, not just design and painting. For me though the real interest lay in Microsoft's *Windows* Developers Conference. This was aimed at people who actually write *Windows* applications and, as such, was refreshingly free of sales hype. Instead, it briefed them on features they'd be able to build into their products over the next few years, the environments their programs would run under, and the tools



Microsoft would be providing for the development process.

The buzz-word (or buzz-acronym) of the Conference was OLE (Object Linking and Embedding), pronounced in the same manner as one would while on holiday on the Costa del Sol. The basic idea is explained by the example of a word processor document which contains a graph produced by another program. You're in your word processor when you decide you want to alter the graph. Instead of loading the other program, you stay in the word processor, double-click on the graph, and a window pops up with the graph program. Amend it, close the window, and the modified graph is right there in your document.

Microsoft is particularly keen on OLE because it can achieve a simple version of it using the DDE (Dynamic Data Exchange) technology present in *Windows*. The next stage is a move towards true object orientation, with a graphics (or sound or video) 'object' knowing how to display and print itself, freeing the host application from accommodating other program formats.

The final stage does away with the host application altogether, and goes on to the unfortunately-named SDI, or Single Document Interface. You load the

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document, not an application program, and as you click on each object within it (text, graphics, video or whatever) it loads its own editing software.

The biggest story to come out of the conference was the death of OS/2 *Presentation Manager* (PM) as a mainstream Graphical User Interface (GUI). That may sound a bit strong, but it's worth remembering that PM is but a graphical front-end to the OS/2 operating system, just what *Windows* is to MS-DOS, and when Microsoft announces that it will produce a 32-bit 80386-family version of *Windows* which will run directly on top of OS/2 v3, and which will contain features which were omitted from *Windows 3* in order to avoid hitting OS/2 PM too hard, then it's hard to draw any other conclusion.

When Microsoft is then lukewarm about PM itself, saying only that 'the version for OS/2 v2 will run with OS/2 v3', it must be nails-in-coffins time.

The root of all this is alleged to be Microsoft's falling-out with IBM over who was in charge of OS/2. The result is that OS/2 v1.3 and v2 will be developed by IBM (with Microsoft's help), while OS/2 v3 will be developed by Microsoft with help from IBM. Microsoft now seems to think that IBM is welcome to keep *Presentation Manager*, while it slips in *Windows* instead. The message is simple – OS/2 has a future as a multi-tasking, single-user operating system, but with *Windows* fronting it, not PM.

It's not such a bad message either, since the idea of the same interface running on everything from a PC/XT with MS-DOS to a multi-processor 486 with OS/2 is rather attractive to both developers and users alike. It's not quite so good though if you're IBM or a dedicated IBM user. What with this and the industry's refusal to jump wholesale on to the PS/2 Microchannel Architecture bandwagon, Big Blue must often regret getting involved with such an awkward bunch as the PC market vendors. ●

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